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Celebrate older Americans and reach out to them

By Andrea G. Smith
and William A. Hartzell

For 44 years our nation has paused to honor older Americans during the month of May. I believe that one of the measures of a great society is how we cherish those that have gone before us to lead the way. These older citizens may be our parents, grandparents, neighbors or even strangers to us today.

In Greenville County there are an estimated 50,000 people who are 60 years old or older and that population is growing rapidly. From 2000 to 2005, Greenville County experienced greater immigration of the over-60 population than any other county in South Carolina.

Improvement in health care over several decades is helping us all live longer. But living longer also means more of us will be competing for health-care providers. Many older Americans are not financially prepared for all those extra years. In fact, they may not be prepared for many aspects of living longer.

Where adult children used to spend more time looking after older family members, today families may be separated by miles. In other cases, family members may be working, raising children of their own and finding less time to look after, let alone care, for aging family members.

Greenville is a very giving community as measured by the number of nonprofits and the success in funding the diverse needs championed by each organization. I believe the community is especially blessed in organizations focused on nurturing and funding efforts to educate

and raising children to educate and care for children. I think there is still plenty of room for us to improve our appreciation of older Americans in Greenville. Let us collectively show our commitment to our older citizens in this county. Here are a few ideas and resources:

■ If you already have older family members, friends or neighbors, spend time with them. Treat them as you would like to be treated. Often older Americans live alone and may go several days without contact from anyone. Invite them on outings with your family, offer to take them to the grocery store when you go, make sure you check on them if you don't see them for a couple of days.

■ If you have older family members, became familiar with Senior Action, the local agency

on aging. The agency is dedicated to strengthening Greenville County's maturing population and their families by providing access to resources they need for physical, emotional and social well-being. Programs include daily lunch and wellness, in-home assessment and services, non-emergency medical appointment transportation, senior volunteers, a large variety of classes and social activities, and many more. There are opportunities to volunteer especially with non-medical transportation. Visit www.senioraction.org, or call 467-3660.

■ Meals on Wheels takes hot meals to homebound citizens, the majority of whom are older citizens. Meals on Wheels needs volunteers to deliver meals during the week. Perhaps you know someone who could benefit from the delivery of a hot meal. Visit www.mealsonwheelsgreenville.org or call 233-6565.

■ Diligent Hands Gracious Hearts provides yard-care services for older citizens and is seeking volunteers. Contact Todd Wilklow at 241-1399 or by e-mail at todd@dhgh.org.

■ Recently, Senior Action presented, with Greenville Hospital System and many other generous sponsors, the Prime of Life Expo at the Carolina First Center. For 11 years this event has provided valuable information for seniors and their families in the Upstate.

Let us all work together to ensure every older person in Greenville County is treated with dignity and respect. In fact, why don't we extend that approach to each person in our community?

GUEST COLUMN



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